

global journalism

FORGET about Internet's publishing possibilities - cyberspace is probably more valuable for the input, rather than output, side of journalism.

After all, you can only make the jewellery once you've got the gold. And the shiny stuff is just waiting to be mined out there in the online world.

A good place to start is at the two dozen or more glittering gateways specially dedicated to helping journalists exploit the Internet. These are designed to make it easy for journalists to enter cyberspace.

Known as one-stop stations, jumpsites or launchpads, these are more than maps pointing to the whereabouts of treasure troves. They're really mine-shafts direct to valuable information.

Says Tim Maloy of the Internet Newsroom site, more than 126 news organisations used this particular launchpad last year. Why? "To harness the power of cyberspace in their newsgathering operations".

Studies show that in North America at least, online research is growing rapidly. Journalists there are finding real wealth in online connectivity.

Predictably, reporters are using the Internet to write about the Internet. But they are also reporting about other subjects by means of the Internet.

To use cyberspace as a research and reporting aid, you need to know something about its geology. What kind of gold is buried there, and how do you find it?

1. ONGOING CHAT GROUPS (CALLED NEWSGROUPS OR USENET).

Starting with this stratum of the Internet, an online miner will discover more than 20 000 vibrant newsgroups. These give a reporter access to what the Poynter Institute's Nora Paul calls a "computer assisted rendezvous". Examples? Alt-skinheads, alt-child-abuse-recovery, alt-crime, alt-censorship... and so on.

A journalist online, like any other online user, goes out on the Internet and visits these groups on whatever computer is host to them - unlike the more formal discussion groups (sometimes called listservs) where postings are sent direct to members' own computers. You go to newsgroups; listservs or discussion groups come to you.

How are journalists using the newsgroups?

- To discover information you didn't even know existed ...

There are a million story ideas in newsgroups waiting to be unearthed. Journalist Alexander Wolfe found one and broke a major story, now known as The Pentium Papers, in November 1994. He simply picked up on a mathematician's remark in a newsgroup that there was a bug in Intel's Pentium computer chip.

It's all change for newspapers. Or part change. No one yet knows.

Global newspaper association, Fiej, enters its 50th year with dynamic debate about how to position newspapers to survive into the 21st century.

As of May, the global organisation has a new name and a new president. Still to be called "Fiej" (the French acronym for the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers), the body has nevertheless been rebaptised as the World Association of Newspapers.

It now represents 15 000 newspapers in more than 40 countries, and is headed by Brazilian publisher and TV magnate Jaime Sirotsky. The question is where it's all headed.

Three years ago, the organisation gave birth to the World Editors Forum as a parallel association aimed at servicing journalists as distinct from publishers. Editors, like owners and managers, are also trying to make sense of a fast-arriving future.

There were record attendances when the two bodies held their annual conferences in Washington DC in May.

But the contrasting themes for the two meetings symbolised the existential quandary faced by the press. While publishers discussed "Visions of the Future", the editors' theme was "Back to Basics".

What endures in newspapers, and what expires, is the issue at the heart of the speeches given at Washington. The excerpts on these pages are made possible with the support of Naspers.

Global trends in newspapering

BASED on 1995 statistics, Norway is once more the world leader with 600 newspapers sold per thousand population; second is Japan with 576; Finland and Sweden tie in third place, with 464 copies per thousand populations. The USA finds itself down in fifteenth place with 226 people per thousand buying their daily newspaper. There is some positive movement towards increased penetration, between 1994 and 1995, in Japan, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Canada, Malaysia, Spain, Turkey, Cyprus, Brazil, Peru, Sri Lanka and India. In nine of these 13 cases, it is true to say that penetration still remains at a very low level - below 150 newspaper buyers per one thousand - and the potential for growth therefore remains high.

IN BRIEF:

- Circulation continues its decline in most of the industrialised world; in the developing countries and those others where readership has been historically low, it is booming.
- Advertising growth for newspapers continues almost everywhere, though it slowed in 1995 in most of the industrialised world, as it increased significantly in developing nations.
- The advertising market share gained by news-papers continues to shrink in the majority of countries.

TIMOTHY BALDING, DIRECTOR-GENERAL WORLD ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPERS.

THE INTERNET
goldmine
for journalists
BY GUY BERGER

- To find required information:

Scott Henry of the *Marin Independent Journal* (California) has been successfully prospecting in newsgroups. His analogy is having to monitor the police radio scanner: the useful bits are often few and far between, but they're there.

Stumbling upon tip-off nuggets and story-ideas in the newsgroups is one thing. Henry has discovered that you can search for specific information as well - by monitoring newsgroups round the clock merely by using a free computer service from Stanford University.

Thanks to the service, titled SIFT, Henry's paper now receives copies from thousands of newsgroups of any message that makes mention of Marin County. "By doing this," he says, "we break a story (major or minor) every other day because of our systematic 'mining' of Usenet".

The *Marin Independent* not only watches what's coming up on the newsgroups through SIFT: it occasionally searches newsgroup archives as well. A number of tools can do perform this task: most notably Infoseek, Deja News (used by the *Marin Independent*) and Alta Vista and Excite.

Journalists are also using newsgroups to:

- Generate new information.

Arthur Goldstuck - a journalist with a pleasantly appropriate surname in the context of mining the Internet - has made a name by collecting and publishing urban legends. He researched his latest book by putting up questions on newsgroups to track new myths ahead of the South African 1994 elections.

"Within two months, I had collected as much material online as I had in two years using conventional methods," he says.

Other journalists have also been out prospecting the newsgroups. US reporter Michael O'Reilly describes: "When I was doing a story on CD-ROMS, the first place I turned to was the Usenet group alt.cd-rom and its FAQ file. I was able to quickly educate myself on CD-ROM technology, history and future trends."

He continues: "I then posted a few questions to the newsgroup. Responses began rolling in within the hour, and continued for the next few days answering all the rest of my questions (the story was on the business applications of CD-ROM technology) and connected me to a few ideal sources to interview."

A final use of newsgroups by journalists entails their ability to:

- Canvass newspaper readers.

Newsgroups can help define the newsagenda. Jim Hopkins of *The Idaho Statesman* tapped an on-line chat group after the Oklahoma bombing, asked people what sort of stories they wanted to read, and then used their responses to shape the paper's coverage.

Thus the riches of this part of the Net. There's another geological stratum worth uncovering.

2. LISTSERVS/DISCUSSION GROUPS:

The advantage of this online service is that a journalist does not have to go out looking for the information, as in newsgroups. It is delivered right to your electronic doorstep.

People subscribe (usually free) to these 40 000-plus discussion groups. The computer hosting a listserv discussion group distributes to each subscriber the messages posted to it. In this way, reporters worldwide are tapping jour-

Create a 3-d community

YOU can't look forward to a future of merely simulating paper in cyberspace. The Web as we know it - two-dimensional simulation of printed pages - is disappearing rapidly. Already you can say farewell to dead info. With Hot Java (and other similar programmes) you can animate information. You can launch agents over the network to do your bidding. Say farewell to flat pages. Together, Java and VRML will open new horizons for design creativity. Imagine instead of a newspaper, a three dimensional news space. Say farewell to solo user experiences. Shortly, you will be able to interact with other page visitors. This is a big deal for newspapers because you are really in the community creation business.

... The next chapter in the Internet revolution is NOT about connecting people to information. Rather it's about connecting people with other people in information-rich environments. The Internet is not merely a conduit but a destination in its own right. It is a space in cyberspace in which people will spend an increasing proportion of their time. The next wave of the Internet will be the construction of these spaces and avatars - our electronic alter-egos - that will inhabit them. What does this mean? — Cyberspace is a full employment act for editors and publishers.

PAUL SAFFO, INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

nalists and non-journalists alike online. With exciting results:

- Getting references to information: Earlier this year, KHOU-TV messaged the Computer-Assisted Reporting and Research Discussion Group (CARR-L), asking for experts on what beef cattle were being fed in the US. In return, list member Ron Tyler posted five rich references to Internet sites, including a University of Maryland round-up of latest studies.

From far-off Croatia, journalist Mario Profaca responded as follows: "there are A HUNDRED LINKS at MAD COW Page" and presented the Internet address and a joke.

- Learning from existing experiences: Discussion groups are great places to find out what others have done. A recent query was posted on the Investigative Reporters and Editors discussion list (IRE-L) under the title, "Lust in the dust". The question under it read: "I'm putting together a series on Leaking Underground Storage Tanks (gasoline) and was wondering if anyone knew of a source which disputes the EPA claims regarding the impact on polluted soil".

Came a reply: "We've done three stories on this in the *Albion Monitor*. Look at the December 21, January 12 and March 10 issues in our morgue...". The Internet addresses to these articles were provided.

Not much deep level digging required here: the glittering goodies are literally strewn on the surface.

- Using discussion groups for tip-offs: Discussion groups are high-yield ores for tip-offs about story possibilities. Looking for an angle on alleged Unabomber Ted Kaczynski? The CARR-L discussion group alerted its members that his mathematical writings could be found at an Internet address. There's a very different angle for the story.

- Getting experts via Profnet: Profnet is a listserv set up to serve its members - whose job, in turn, is give service to the media. This listserv's subscribers are 2400 public information officers at educational and research institutions in 17 countries. The reporter pops the question, and they all try to find experts to answer it.

There are many successful experiences with Profnet: To cite just one, the *Boston Globe* needed someone to comment on the impact of traffic flow of a new highway being built. The academic whom Profnet put them onto had just returned from an independent inspection of the very project.

Comments Swedish journalism researcher Joakim Sandberg of Profnet: "It's the difference between fishing with a hook and fishing with a net."

There's more online than newsgroups and listservs. There's electronic mail as a communication device.

3. E-MAIL FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Journalists are using e-mail facilities successfully to receive information like press releases, interview hard-to-reach sources and to communicate with readers. Many report great results, especially used in conjunction with information gleaned from other facilities in cyberspace.

Negating assembly-line news

B RING skills together in groups or clusters. Writing, editing and graphics. Avoid terms such as 'team' because it is full of biases that would deflect people's imaginations. The leader is simply titled cluster-leader. This person is the organiser, the motor and the negotiator. There isn't a managing editor, nor a city editor, nor assignment editor, nor photo editor. At our paper these functions are still being done, in different ways, under different job descriptions. The editor-in-chief has associate editors in this cluster and that cluster is called 'the editorship'. Clusters on our paper are:

- community cluster: includes police, courts, levels of government;
- work and wealth (includes the technology reporter);

- family: schools, health, social services;
- applause: the sports columnist lives here along with other specialists such as the drama critic and the movie critic;
- opinion: daily editorials, columnists, letters to the editor, forum and speakers corner.

Cluster leaders can be seen as the wholesalers offering their wares to the section editors who are like retailers with empty shelves that need filling every day. Section editors don't have staff, only space or empty shelves.

The art department works for everybody. Photographers are assigned to clusters, but must be available for other clusters too. Writing, editing and some design takes place in each cluster.

WILLIAM MCGRATH, ART DIRECTOR, LONDON FREE PRESS (CANADA)

Lighting a path for future journalism

A BRIGHT future for print journalism should be built on newspapers that do not feel compelled to mime TV's frequently superficial theatrics. Sensationalism becomes boring. Can-you-top-this journalism ends up not being journalism. While some in the media wallow in the muck, we must take the higher road.

... Those in charge must insist on staffs and managements that reflect the community. We can never cover our communities well enough until we fully reflect the places we serve. Our progress on the path to pluralism remains mostly glacial. Frequently disgracefully so. We also need to broaden our definition of 'pluralism' to include age, sexual orientation, thought, lifestyle and other factors of inclusion.

... There are no silver bullets - no one thing, or even a few things, that we can do that will meet every challenge. Instead we must move on many fronts. At the place where I work, that covers a satellite edition, joint ventures with Spanish and English language stations, online content in two languages, and much more. All are moons around the daily planet called the newspaper.

... Do not tell me that you need to run your grandmother over in order to make it in journalism. Quite to the contrary. The cynic has no real staying power. As Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times* recently: "Scepticism is about asking questions, being dubious, being wrong, not being gullible. Cynicism is about already having the answers - or thinking you do - about a person or an event".

... I see a future where people continue to enter the business for the same reasons you and I did - for ideals of public service and the quite honorable desire to make this world better. While other media focus on instant gratification, we will provide the coverage and commentary that prod people to think for themselves. Democracy thrives on reflection. Democracy needs journalism.

... Our future is in focusing on stories of real importance and telling them thoughtfully. Doing journalism that tells the reader what is really going on. Journalism that is unafraid to celebrate good people and good things. Journalism that is unhesitating in its pursuit of wrongdoers.

DAVID LAWRENCE, PUBLISHER AND CHAIRMAN, MIAMI HERALD

4. COMMERCIAL AND OTHER DATABASES

There are numerous types of databases in the online world, dealing in even more numerous data. Amongst them are:

- Electronic archives. Who needs the clippings morgue down the passage, when the world's press is increasingly available to journalists at their desks? Take for instance the commercial online collection held by Dialog, with approximately 70 newspaper databases - including publications from the USA, Hong Kong, Thailand, the UK and elsewhere.

Australia's *Courier Mail* reporter Paula Doneman searched the Dialog archives and discovered that her local story about biker gangs involved in organised crime had parallels in Russia, Canada, the USA and Europe. It meant she could write additional copy with a global angle.

A number of commercial services exist to filter information in databases. Newshound, or Fishwrap, for instance, will copy articles on topics you have chosen in advance and post them to your personal e-mail.

Besides for paper archives, journalists are striking it rich in another type of database:

- Records databases: Says David Milliron of Gannett (USA), about a dozen of his company's newspapers use the DBT Online database for investigative journalism.

"For instance, just inputting what limited information we knew on Theodore Kaczynski (accused Unabomber) we were able within minutes to locate his family, relatives and neighbors. We also used it, for instance, during the Oklahoma bombing to locate all the suspects and their family, relatives and neighbors."

If these are examples of the riches in the database geological layer, there is yet more wealth to found in the hot lava, (or is it java?), layer of the online world, a stratum that is giving rise to major volcanic eruption. It's the Web.

5. WWW AND GOPHER. (THE INTERNET NARROWLY CONCEIVED)

Gopher databases constituted the original stuff of the Internet, but they are increasingly being eclipsed by - or merged into - the singing and dancing World Wide Web. These Web publishing sites are springing up as fast as events arise.

Existing publications are going online by the week, and every day thousands of institutions and individuals previously outside the publishing business are getting in on the act.

So how are journalists using gopher databases and especially the fast-growing Web?

- Retrieving information: *Financial Mail* journalist Robert Laing comments: "The Internet's biggest boon for me is that government's green and white papers, commission reports and other public documents are online. This has made it a lot easier to report and analyse the progress of SA's new telecommunications legislation. Other countries' policy documents are also available online, helping journalists place local trends in an international context."

Beth Marchak of the *Plain Dealer's* Washington Bureau has found that FedWorld, the US government's site covering 130 bulletin

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boards and databases is "a great start to a story". Elsewhere on the Internet, and aided by the Foxpro programme to analyse much of the data she collects, Marchak has accessed vital information from the web pages of the Federal Aviation Authority and the Valujet Airline.

The result: she was able to expose safety problems at Valujet and the efforts to keep these secret. Says Marchak: "Using computers I'm six months ahead of the crowd on some aviation stories, but right now too few people understand that."

● Monitoring changes:

According to Scott Henry, there are now about 50 newspapers and magazines worldwide that offer free archive searches via the WWW. The URL-Minder programme can monitor updates of past searches on about one quarter of these, and Henry has used this to full advantage.

Using this system he found a Marin County couple sailing around the world, and interviewed in the Newport News, Virginia; a prominent police official from Lancashire planning to retire to the county; a local musician who had started his own recording studio in Los Angeles; etc.

● Reference information:

Many journalists are becoming savvy to the WWW's abundance of reference information, whether this be a telephone directory where you can also find someone's e-mail address, the CIA's global statistics, quotations, dictionaries, translation programmes, or similar. Information for checking facts is there and it's being used.

6. WHERE TO DIG ...

Amongst all these layers of the online geological world are some very special gems: "spiders" or "intelligent agents" that scour cyberspace and compile catalogs and indexes that in turn can be probed with one of some 20 search engines, most of them for free.

These tools make life much easier because they automatically locate the exact stuff a journalist wants. They mean the difference between surfing and searching. But be advised: for maximum benefit, you need to know how to use them, and what their limitations are.

In particular, if information is not on the World Wide Web, or not to be found easily with a given Internet search engine, this does not mean that the information does not exist elsewhere online. Nora Paul warns that the Internet is not a replacement for commercial databases like Nexis-Lexis or Dialog - not yet anyway.

New York freelance journalist Oliver Brotski adds: "Searching the Internet is time-intensive. That's why when I freelance at ABC News World Research Center, we use online databases, not the Internet, when we have less than 5-10 minutes to locate a fact."

In short, the price of gold rises as deadline frenzy grows, and here dedicated commercial databases, despite their charges, may often give up the gilt more effectively.

According to Michael Jesse of Dayton Newspapers: "We still use commercial online services and anticipate continuing to do so. Information has value and I expect to pay for depth, breadth and quality. Which isn't to say you never find those qualities on the Web, but very frequently you do not. There is a lot of fool's gold mixed in with the real stuff."

People and our primary purpose

IT IS possible for newspapers to come closer to the whole truth about a terribly complicated story. It is possible, and hard, and rare. It takes time. It may take money, but above all, it takes unusual, gifted people - journalists with an ear and a heart and a brain - to understand a bit more about the story and put it into words.

... These people cannot be summoned into being by fibre-optic cables and high speed modems. And when we fail to tell a story, it makes a difference. ... Whatever form that news organisations and news media take in the future, they still will be trying to explain an impossibly complicated world to readers and viewers. That job is hard, regardless of technology. But it remains our most important responsibility.

DONALD GRAHAM, CEO WASHINGTON POST

Japan pioneers the portable paper

THE IDEA of the Mainichi Zaurus electronic newspaper has emerged out of experiments. Zaurus is one of Japan's hottest-selling personal digital assistants (PDAs). More than 800 000 Zaurus machines have been delivered in the market so far, accounting for 80 percent of the domestic market for portable information terminals.

... Even though its screen display capacity is smaller than that of the office or household personal computer, and its communication speed is 2 400 bits per second at present, it has the merit of weighing only about 200 grams, making it light enough to carry in the coat inside pocket or in a handbag.

... Our news and information, excluding columns, is condensed into 150 characters and stored in the Nifty Serve computer. There are expected to be two million members of Nifty Serve by August. Amongst these members will be those Zaurus owners who will be able to use a telephone to download the news to read it whenever and wherever desired.

... There are 18 genres, updated twice a day, with sports results being distributed more frequently. The 18 genres are: hot news; sports flash; general domestic and foreign news; politics; economy; international; city; sports; leading people; editorials; multimedia information; personal computer magazine information; corporate information about new products; weather; toku-toku information (an entertainment listings system); fortune telling and lottery tickets; rankings of popular hit songs; and leisure.

... Some 100 hot news items are provided on a busy day, but 10 items in the morning and 10 in the evening are the basic amount for politics, economy, international and city.

... The user can download all genres at once, or select a genre of choice. The monthly charge is 500 yen, plus a telephone charge and connecting charge for using Nifty Serve for each access. This 500 yen is good for slightly more than one cup of coffee at a coffee-shop in Japan. We thought this price would be acceptable to consumers.

... The monthly charge for the Zaurus electronic newspaper is about one-eighth that of the printed Mainichi Shimbun. Readers of the Zaurus numbered 4000 in April this year. The target is 20 000 subscribers by the end of August, six months after the start of the electronic paper, and 50 000 after one year.

KOJI TAKEUCHI, MAINICHI SHIMBUN, JAPAN.

7. MINING KNOW-HOW

Chris Terry of the Owatonna People's Press reminds would-be online miners that: "Internet resources are only as good as your reporters."

Like any mining activity, training is needed not only to raise productivity: it is essential in order to avoid the pitfalls - especially the costs of untutored online searching of commercial databases. There are also potential disasters in misinterpreting information or falling for misleading information.

Skills are thus relevant to more than efficient search procedures. Locating the facts is only half the business of journalistic research. Interpreting them is the other.

From the LA Times editorial library, Debbie Coyle declares: "The important part of information gathering on the web (and elsewhere) is NOT finding it - any 'kid who surfs the web all day' can do that ... The important part is evaluating the information - for applicability, correctness, timeliness, and a host of other criteria."

Online miners not only need to locate the gold: it needs to be brought up to the surface, weighed, measured, tested and packaged for further transit.

8. THE DOWNSIDE:

Mining is never without dangers, and digging in online services is no exception. Here are some of the negatives:

● Time-wasting:

Brian O'Keefe, producer of CBS programme "48 hours", was asked if he ever found it difficult to confirm a fact online. His response: "Last week I was trying to find when 243 servicemen were killed in Beirut.... I spent about an hour going nuts, weeding through all these citations." Eventually a "real human being librarian opened up a book and found the date himself".

● Over-reliance on online sources:

Online sources are typically insufficient for a story. This is a supplementary tool, not a replacement, for direct contacts with sources and direct visits to places. As Gannett's David Milliron stresses: "Computer-assisted reporting is nothing more than a tool. Access to online records gives reporters and editors a starting point to their reporting."

This is echoed by Nora Paul: "Computer assisted reporting is just that: an assistance. It is not called computer completed reporting." According to Beth Marchak: "Don't be lulled into one-source reporting. Don't think the computer is doing your work."

And magazine journalist Lamar Graham says of her use of Profnet: "This is not some kind of journalistic cyber-panacea. It doesn't replace the telephone or shoe leather. It augments them." Online over-reliance is also raised by St Petersburg Times (USA) journalist Elijah Gosier, in a column headlined "E-mail talks a lot but it doesn't say much".

Over-dependency on cybersources raises the question: Is online mining just a recycling of pre-existing information, and a disincentive to original thinking and research?

It could be. But it would be a pity if journalists were only to repackage information already published elsewhere. Online access should not displace the need to find gold in places far removed from the electronic nirvanas, nor the need to add journalistic value to that which is already available to go online.

● Another downside is:

● Distortion related to online availability.

Proof that old-fashioned journalism works

THIS is a story about the comeback of the quality newspaper. Three years back, our paper was the fifth largest paper in Denmark, and based in one of our provinces.

It is now the leading national paper, with an especially successful Sunday edition. Advertising revenues have risen markedly.

The secret has been in old-fashioned journalism. If you repeat what is on television or in magazines, you devalue what a newspaper can do. Let them do what they do best. The solid foundation of a newspaper is information; entertainment is only a small part of it.

While other papers have cut back on staff, we have invested heavily in journalistic talent. In four years, Morgenavisen has added 60 new reporters - many in foreign bureaux - and expanded its newshole by a fifth. Combined with an assertive marketing campaign, the investment has paid off neatly in terms of circulation.

Morgenavisen is a paper run by journalists. Our decisions - even marketing ones - are made by editorial. They are not made by consultants, nor by readers. We don't do reader surveys or run focus groups. Morgenavisen rejects calling a newspaper "the product" and the readers "the customer".

You can get new technology, do redesigns and even start to publish online and not raise your circulation at all. Journalism is what counts.

It is basically nonsense that newspapers are being superceded by other media. The future belongs to papers with editorial quality and a sharp profile. Hence, at Morgenavisen we stress quality journalism and the role of the press in a democracy. In this way, the paper has demonstrated a winning strategy.

JØRGEN EJBØL, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EDITOR, MORGENAVISEN JYLLANDS-POSTEN, DENMARK
(Note: Items supplemented from an article on the Morgenavisen in American Journalism Review, distributed at the conference).

As a result of online info's accessibility to reporters, the very journalistic enterprise can start to lean too heavily on these sources.

As Robert Laing notes, with so much state information now available online, this may prompt the media into giving "government documents more coverage than they deserve". To reflect only - or even primarily - that part of the world's information and limited social spectrum which is online is a disservice to journalism.

A final negative to note is the danger for the two cornerstones of journalism

● Accuracy and reliability:

As with any mining, there is always a need not only to evaluate what's dug up, but also to refine and purify the product. While gold traditionally used to be treated with cyanide, online services need a strong measure of traditional journalistic cynicism.

Cautions the *Atlanta Constitution and Journal's* Kathleen Flynn: "Just because it is electronic does not mean it is true." In the opinion of Dayton's Michael Jesse, the WWW, "is the biggest vanity press in the history of mankind." Reporters have to take extra steps in to judge the accuracy and level of expertise of the online publishers.

In short, there are important professional and ethical implications in mining the online world.

9. THE 1001 OTHER JOURNALISTIC USES FOR AN INTERNET

Many reporters may be tempted by the line on one jumpsite for journals: "When your editor's not looking!" — and its links to entertainment sites.

Then there's *Journalism Bookmarks* by veteran online journalists Randy Reddick and Dan Gillmor. After its worthy list of sites, it displays the entry: *Useless Web Pages. After you've done all that Important Journalism, stop here for a few giggles.*

Something else for miners to consider is a remark by former TV journalist Jim Upshaw from an article titled *The Virtual Watercooler*: "The online world is full of reporters doing what reporters do: assembling research, finding things to read, wasting time, cultivating sources, floating trial balloons, complaining about editors, following paper trails, moonlighting, sniping at the competition, and hanging out."

Do journalists "hang out" online, and is that such a bad thing? My answers - yes, and no.

IN CONCLUSION

There is much attention today to journalists as producers of information on the Internet. We forget that journalists are also consumers of information, and that indeed, to be a good producer of information, whether for paper or broadcast or cyberspace, a journalist needs to be a good consumer. And to be a consumer, today, ought to include consumption of online info.

My case is for journalists to consume more information via online services. Against this, people may argue that in world of information-overload, where journalists struggle to select, compress and cut even their off-line information, the need is for less, not more, information.

I disagree. Information is what makes the difference between dependent reportage and independent journalism. As Canadian journalist Tom Koch argues, all too often journalists are forced

A Spanish Clark Kent

IN MY country, a new government and a new prime minister has replaced the charismatic socialist leader, Felipe Gonzalez, after 13 years in power. Most political analysts and Gonzalez himself recognise that this defeat in the election of March 3 and the fall from grace of the Socialist Party, are the direct result of serious corruption scandals uncovered by the press.

... The existence of a vicious circle of corruption and state-sponsored terrorism was proved when *El Mundo* discovered in mid-1994 that high officials of the ministry of the Interior had been appropriating money from the secret funds meant to pay for the dirty war against ETA.

... When later developments and court rulings bore out the truth of our revelations, the Gonzalez government accused us of spearheading a conspiracy against democracy. Sometimes they said we served sinister financial interests, others that we worked for Mr Azner (opposition leader) and his party, or even that we, the journalists, were trying to seize power for ourselves without winning the support of the people through elections.

... For those journalists who have participated in the investigation to uncover hidden truths, these are days of wine and roses similar to the post-Watergate euphoria experience in the US. Etched in my memory, a relic of those days, is a celebrated cover of *New Yorker* magazine. Divided into two sections, the first showed a weak and depressed Superman entering a telephone booth and the second a powerful and euphoric Clark Kent brandishing his pad and pen. The caption read: 'And now to fight corruption in the highest places.'

PEDRO RAMIREZ, EDITOR IN CHIEF, EL MUNDO, SPAIN

Content could go commercial

A newspaper is a representation, or manifestation, of its community. No one knows the community like its local newspaper. So, the local newspaper can help advertisers get personal, can engage with advertisers and sell the local experiences and knowledge that is a newspaper.

... The newspaper can physically put the local community on the digital map. It could establish an Internet site which would literally be a representation of the town, neighbourhood, or community that the newspaper lives in. All the community members would have a place on that site. Instead of being 'newspaper centric' on the Internet, the newspaper should be 'community centric'. This could be truly valuable to an advertiser.

...What I'd really like is a

customised newspaper. Created by real newspapers. A science paper for my technology clients. A business paper for our business clients, a sports paper for my entertainment clients. The big opportunity is for newspapers to become third party content providers to the advertising community. This is in contrast to the newspaper being the advertising vehicle. It turns the table on the traditional role of paper and advertisers. It creates new revenue streams for a paper, new readers and opportunities to use content which might otherwise have gone unused.

... The consumer of the paper edition will be significantly different than the consumer of the digital edition. If I'm right, there is an opportunity to focus more sharply your analog product — your paper

into sheer reportage of what politicians and experts say, simply because they do not have the knowledge or background to question it.

The answer, Koch says, is to use computer-assisted journalism and online information options, to empower the reporters. These facilities can shift the balance in their favour - rendering them less dependent on what one newsmaker is telling them.

Koch continues: "There will be editors who say this is all very nice, but 'I want my reporters out interviewing, talking to people. Not playing with computers.' ... The question for these editors, of course, is: what questions do you want your reporters to ask the experts and officials? [And what experts, officials and other people?-GB]?"

He concludes: "Interviewers need ammunition, need more than a source, a leak, a single contrary report. ... And where else but online are they going to get it?"

Koch overstates his case. Yet the more the world continues its headlong pace to become wired, the more important online mining will become to journalists.

You ought not to get carried away with gold-fever, but you'd be a fool not to recognise the developing reality. There's really gold in them thar online services ...

Guy Berger is professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. An expanded version of this article is available online at <http://www.ru.ac.za/departments/journal/gold.html>

Web Press

ONLINE news publishing is something very different than simply an extension of news publishing paper. It uses a new technology as different as the gasoline engine is from the horse. And just as automobiles produced highways, shopping centres and bedroom suburbs, so will online news publishing produce its own completely unanticipated consequence - including new forms of what we today call 'the newsroom'.

... Online news skills not ordinarily required in the traditional newspaper newsroom encompass:

- Theory and practice of online and Web page design - an evolving skill as browsers and technology evolves;
- Intimate familiarity with what else is on the Web;
- Thinking in terms of multi-media: dynamic graphics, animated infographics, graphics with sound over, etc.;
- Multimedia technical skills - how to use new tools like JAVA, ShockWave and VRML;
- How to build threaded Webs related to an evolving

story and how to access in-depth hyperlinked materials that are background to every key story;

- How to create friendly, usable news-archives;
- How to build and keep maintained databases: movie and restaurant reviews, emergency and medical resources, shopping available, etc.;
- Willingness to respond to a lot of e-mail;
- How to cross-index news items with hyperlinks to other Websites;
- GCI and PERL scripting, and advanced Web design technical procedures.

... Creating a dynamic and effective electronic publication is not just a production job. It requires mobilising a new set of skills in new ways in a new organisational context. Much new must be learned to create a newsroom to meet these challenges. Even harder, much of what traditional newspaper managers and editors know must be forgotten.

VINCENT GIULIANO, THE ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING GROUP, USA.

Cost: R10 per paper (incl. VAT and postage)

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